

## **GOVERNOR BLANCO'S HEALTH CARE AGENDA**

### **From Governor Blanco's State of the State Address, March 29, 2004**

I want to thank each one of you who participated in our very successful health care summit. Last month, more than one thousand people gathered in New Orleans to share ideas and to call for improvements to our health care system. Rapidly escalating costs are devouring the resources of our government and our families.

Our citizens are demanding access to good-quality, affordable basic health care. And we must deliver.

I know that like me, you want a health care system that puts people first.

As a first step, I have directed the Department of Health and Hospitals to begin focusing on ways to get better outcomes for the health care dollars we spend.

We will begin identifying high-cost patients and services and, using the data we collect, we will focus our resources to improve quality and decrease costs.

We will continue our push to increase the number of federally qualified health care centers. These health care centers are private, non-profit or public clinics that provide preventive care to underserved areas of our state. And they provide lower-cost alternatives to hospital and emergency room care.

Over two thousand people participated in our regional pre-summit meetings. These people expressed a strong desire to be a part of the solution. And so, we will formalize our regional models to maintain local input as we work toward reforming our health care system.

I am also directing the Department of Health and Hospitals to prepare information on health indicators, by region. And I will ask leaders in those regions to use this data to help formulate local priorities.

We will be working on proposals for fundamental, long-term, and systemic reform of our state's health care system. I expect that during next year's Regular Session you will be asked to act on these health care reform measures.

In the meantime, we must also guarantee that each dollar in our budget works harder for us. We need to get the best prices possible for prescription drugs. That is why I am asking the Commissioner of Administration and the Secretary of Department of Health and Hospitals to explore the feasibility of using the combined buying power of four programs: the Medicaid program, the state employee health insurance program, and our prison and state hospital systems. We must make an effort to drive down the cost of prescription drugs.

## **From Governor Blanco's Remarks to the Louisiana Health Care Summit, March 3, 2004**

It's now more apparent to me than ever that the citizens of Louisiana are not interested in maintaining the status quo. We have heard the call to action loud and clear: put the people first.

The status quo is not working for anyone – the public, privates or Louisiana patients.

So now, the real work of reforming our system begins. As I have said before, the complexities and problems in our system were not created overnight. They will not be fixed in one summit.

But we have started the work. We have come together to openly exchange our ideas – from patients to doctors, from providers to advocates.

Here's what I heard over the past day and a half....

- Louisiana spends a lot of money on health care but receives a low return on investment.
- The federal bank is drying up.
- Lots of people are providing care but we have a lack of coordination. We can fix that.
- Health indicators matter. They lead to better decisions. Simply put a health population leads to a healthy economy.
- We have to make some hard decisions because as Lynn Nichols said, "One person's cost is another person's income."

So where do we go from here? During the regional presentations yesterday, I heard community concerns and was asked one specific question.... "Is anything really going to come of this?" Yes.

There are a number of short-term improvements, which we will pursue immediately.

- Begin focusing on performance outcomes using evidence-based principals -- that means we will get better outcomes for the dollars we spend.
- Go where the money is. Use data to identify high cost patients and services and focus resources to improve quality and decrease costs.

- I learned a new word “mon-op-sony” – government acting as a sole buyer. Louisiana will use this buying power to leverage better costs and smarter purchasing.
- We will continue our push to increase the number of Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) including looking at whether to make some parish health units into FQHCs. We know that in Louisiana like politics, all health care is local.
- When it comes to the uninsured, many of our speakers mentioned expanding coverage to LaChip parents first as one way to begin truly helping our uninsured citizens. We will pursue that and other options.
- A fragmented health care system leads to increased costs. So I am instructing DHH to foster the sharing of information among the various public providers and between public and private providers.
- Information technology is key to cutting costs and improving clinical outcomes. Therefore I will ask DHH to pursue ways to bring improvements in information technology to our medical enterprise.
- Because many of you have expressed a desire to be a part of the solution...we will formalize our regional pre-summit models to maintain local input. We need a state of the state Health Care report being delivered to you.
- And in order to encourage your regional efforts, I am directing Dr. Fred Cerise and his team to prepare health indicators by region and I ask that you use this report to help drive local priorities.
- As Reed Tuckson pointed out, many of our health problems relate to lifestyle issues such as tobacco use, obesity, lack of adequate prenatal care and inconsistent seat belt use. We need to be deliberate in attacking these costly problems.
- Another thing I learned is that much work has been done. Therefore we will not reinvent the wheel.

I will appoint a Governor's Health Care Reform Panel to both consider the findings of current Louisiana health care studies as well as to serve as a thoughtful body to design short-term and long-term solutions to our health problems.

I want a preliminary report in four months. Secretary Cerise and I will appoint a representative group of people who are interested in reform.

The long-term challenge, of course, is to develop a model of care that ensures that everyone has access to timely and high-quality medical services while we also work to

embrace healthy lifestyles and fitness.

I am convinced that a long-term strategy will be the key to successful health care reform. I have asked the representatives of some of the national organizations who have spoken to us this week to stay connected to us, and continue giving us their expertise as we move forward in this reform effort.

Finally, I want to thank you all for the open-minded and innovative ways that each of you approached this summit.

We cannot afford to lose the positive energy in this room.

And I am determined to work with the Legislature and you in the coming months and years to make sure that this summit will be remembered as the event that sparked significant, lasting and meaningful reform of our health care system.

Before I conclude, I would like to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of Dr. Cerise and Dr. Jimmy Clarke, who worked long and hard to make this summit a success. Thank you both for your valuable contributions.

I would also like to offer a special thanks to Senator John Breaux for everything he did to ensure the success of these last two days. Senator Breaux, we need your wisdom and your energy during the coming year as we try to enact some of the ideas that have emerged.

I hope you know that I will count on your continued support and input as we embark on the road to reforming our health system. On behalf of everyone here today and all the people of our state, thank you for your service to Louisiana and the nation.

We've come together over the past two days because we care deeply about our state and its people. We want a health care system that strengthens our families, protects our children, our elderly, and those least able to care for themselves.

Each of you gave up two days of your life because you wanted to be part of this exciting and challenging movement to create a new health care system. And for that I thank you and promise that I will do everything in my power to make certain that your investment of time was worthwhile, for in every decision I make you have my commitment that I will put the people first.